

KAUFMANN, from page 3

J.T.: What is one thing that would really fight poverty?

G.K.: A living wage. That's the biggest thing. Let's set a minimum wage, but a minimum wage where we can afford the basics, and if we're not going to set a minimum wage that does that let's look at the work supports, like childcare and access to training for a living wage and schools that aren't segregated and funded from local property taxes so that they're not separate and unequal. But if we could set a living wage, that would go a far way.

J.T.: What are the long-term effects of having such a wide gulf between the haves and the have-nots on society?

G.K.: It's not sustainable. You have people who can't afford homes or education or even consumer goods. Even from a selfish point of view, it's not good for sustaining the economy of this country. You have an incredible waste of human potential. We're already seeing that by relegating people to a life without access to making the most of themselves and contributing to their communities because they're just struggling to survive. It's bad for democracy. You've got people who aren't invested in a system that doesn't care about their interests and their aspirations. I think it's amazing to me that there is not more social strife, and as this chasm grows, there's got to be a lot more social strife. People will do whatever they need to do to take care of their kids, and if the system is turned against them, then you would expect there to be more crime and demonstration and conflict.

J.T.: Do you have any positive news that gives you hope?

G.K.: Somebody did a guest post for me about TANF. There are people at the state level trying to do things to change TANF, like give people access to education, to get rid of some of the time limits and more flexibility. Some states don't even want to say what they're doing because they're afraid that there's going to be a Republican backlash.

There's a lot of nonviolent action right now against banks and against Wal-Mart. There are people organizing to show the injustices of our economy, and it's hard to measure what that's doing and what positive effect that's having, but I think it will.

The only positive from sequestration is that when they quickly fixed the parts that affected airlines, you saw a bunch of articles in the mainstream media saying that Washington can fix that, but they can't fix Head Start funding or WIC (a nutrition program) funding or housing-assistance funding. So it seemed like at least from a national media standpoint, people are starting to get it. It really crystallized what the values in Congress are.

So depressing. I wish I had some more positives I could just reel off. Again, this is not measurable, but I think there are growing numbers or people fighting to preserve and expand the safety net, fighting for better jobs, fighting for fair immigration, fighting for schools where success isn't measured by test scores. I think that those groups, which are often separate, are going to coalesce more and more. I think that change is happening even if it's hard to see sometimes.

JIMENEZ, from page 9

Woodburn, we had last year 350 families on the wait list. If you were number 25 on there, beyond that point, you are probably never going to get in. Except that families fall off the list, because they're homeless and they keep moving. According to the State of Oregon Housing and Community Services, we're only meeting 1 to 2 percent of the demand for farmworker housing statewide. The rest are probably living in substandard housing and many of them are homeless.

J.Z.: What's the damage of that – not just to the families experiencing it, but also to the larger health of our agricultural industry and society?

R.J.: There are various drags on the economy. The most obvious in this situation being that growers can't get labor, so crops are sitting unharvested in the field. If those are the more grueling types of jobs, like picking strawberries and cucumbers, then those crops aren't grown. And a lot of fields are sitting fallow because they don't have enough labor to pick the crops; the growers can't make money. Many people think that through mechanization that the demand for labor is decreasing, but the Oregon Department of Agriculture stated recently that the demand for labor is increasing, it's more labor-intensive crops that are being grown right now.

Another thing is if their children don't have access to education and opportunities, what happens? We create a permanent underclass that is primarily Latino? I hesitate to speculate on what that would look like in 25 years, if those children didn't have access to education.

And then there is the loss to our society and our communities of motivated, talented people who desire to do more, to be more engaged, to be productive: If they don't have those opportunities, that's a loss to all of us as well.

There are negative health impacts, not just on the individuals. The life expectancy of a migrant farmworker, last time anyone was able to quantify it, was 49 years. It's really, really hard work and there's also the exposure to pesticides.

J.Z.: And their diet affects their health.

R.J.: They're not eating the food they're harvesting. They're eating lower quality food, and it has an impact. Seventy-five percent of the families who live in our housing don't have access to health care, so you're talking about a lot of negative health impacts, and it means they're going to be accessing health care through emergency rooms when they can.

J.Z.: How would you characterize the country's immigration laws?

R.J.: Somewhere between imbalanced and very callous. I don't believe it actually has much to do with immigration and jobs, and I believe it has a lot to do with race and ethnicity.

What happens when you break up families? It doesn't alleviate any of the social problems people believe they are addressing. It creates further burden on the state. How many farmworkers are documented or undocumented? That's impossible to tell. We don't have any idea. That's a labor issue, not a housing issue.

J.Z.: And how is the State Legislature doing?

R.J.: We now have driver's licenses back. That was huge win. When the previous governor signed the requirement to be documented into law years ago, taxi services sprung up! So those who were documented and had licenses saw an opportunity. The driver's license issue really speaks to the ability of parents to take care of their families.

J.Z.: What do you want people to know about the 21st century immigrant in this country?

R.J.: This country still represents opportunity, even in face of the obstacles that immigrants far too often encounter. And that says something really positive about us as a country. And the other side is that we can't live in isolation. It's a global world and we should learn to embrace that. Immigrants bring a lot of commitment, energy, and enthusiasm to their futures and the future of the communities that they live in. And ultimately, it's all local.



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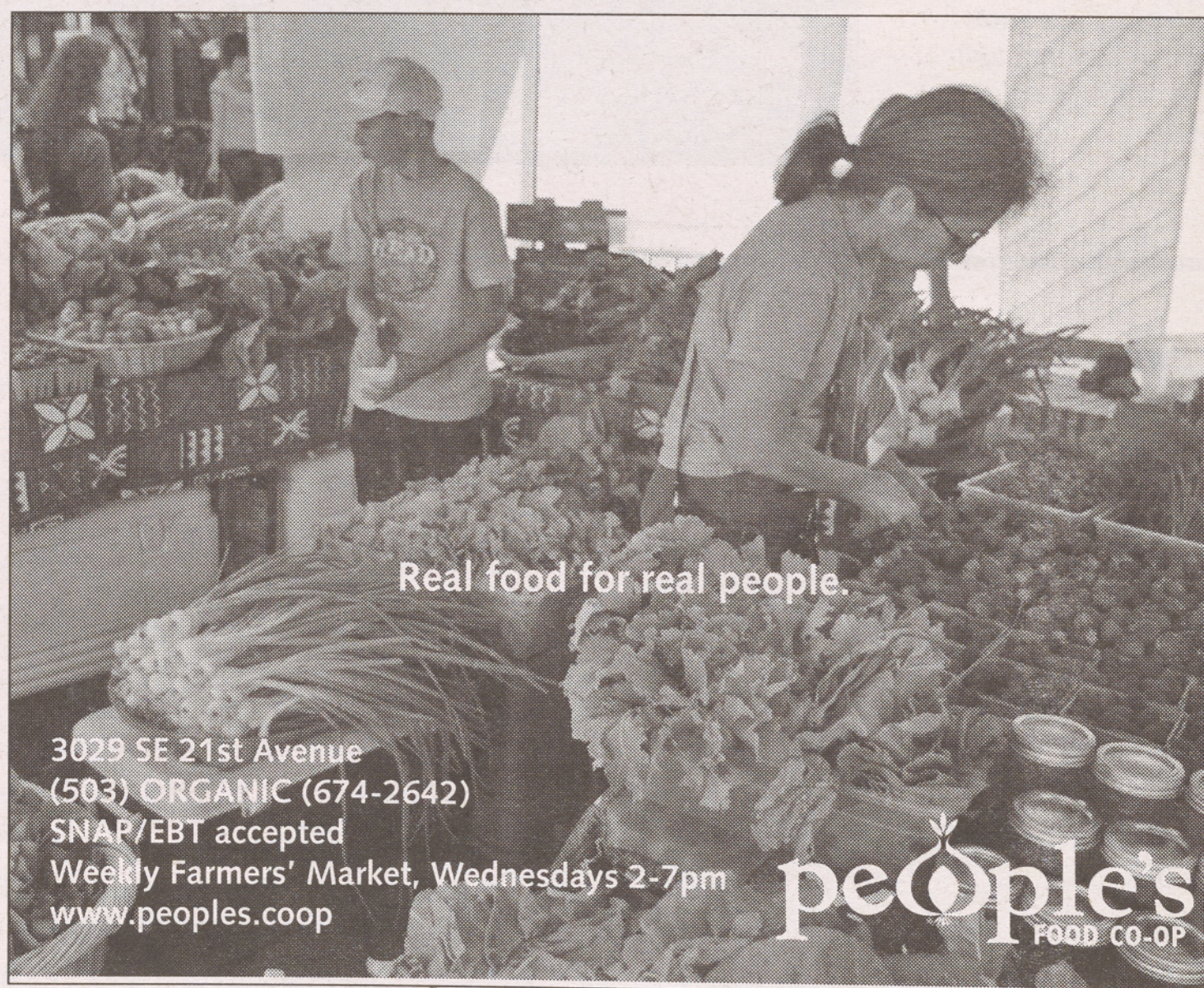


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